



Caring Better for the Flock

The Story of Scripture – Part 39

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open with me to 1 Peter 5. As you're turning, I want to welcome those of you who are joining us. It's good to be together around God's Word. We are coming up on our last week in a journey together through the story of Scripture. This week we'll get to the end of Revelation, and Lord willing, next week I'll preach on Revelation.

I read somewhere that Revelation is the book of the Bible that people in the church most want to hear taught because they don't understand it, but it's also the book of the Bible that preachers in the church least want to teach because they don't understand it either. I love the last book of the Bible. I cannot wait to show you how it ties this whole story of Scripture together and gives us rock-solid hope to bank our lives on—today and forever. Lord willing, that will be next week, so you don't want to miss that.

Now today, my heart is really heavy coming into this text. Let me explain what we're about to read. The beginning of 1 Peter 5 is a charge to elders in the church. The word that's used here is a reference to pastors who have responsibility for overseeing and leading the church. The beginning is a charge for pastors to care for the church well. These verses, along with others in the Bible, make it clear that pastors like me are accountable before God for how well we care or don't care for the church.

By "the church," I don't mean the institution—I mean the people who make up the church. I, along with other pastors in this church, am going to stand before God to give an account for how we cared for every member in this church. That is heavy. But this is not just to pastors, because this passage also contains instructions to members in the church. The thrust of the passage is that we are responsible for humbly caring for each other and guarding each other from harm.

As I was reading this passage last week in our Bible Reading Plan, I started reflected on all the ways that we as pastors and members can better care for each other in the church. I think there are many different directions we could go in applying this word from God, but there's one direction that's been on my heart and mind for a while that I want to dive into specifically today as an application of what we're about to read.

As I look at the church throughout our culture, this is a pressing issue in our culture as a whole, not just in the church. This issue is the care and protection of children. So I want to read this passage, then show you three truths about us that we learn here. Then we're going to pause and apply these truths to this specific issue of caring for children. That will lead us to three truths about Jesus that I pray will encourage, strengthen and maybe bring healing to you.

For those who are not Christians, I pray that these truths might lead you to see the beauty of Jesus for the first time and that you might decide to follow Him today. Some of you might even want to put on one of these shirts and be baptized to say, "Yes, I trust Jesus with my life."

Let me pray toward this end.

O God, You know all I have wrestled through, not just this week but for a long time, in preparation for this. I want to be faithful before You as a pastor to care for Your church well and not shy away from hard, real issues where we live. I pray this not just for myself, but for the other pastors in our church and for pastors from other churches who regularly visit here or listen to these sermons. We want to be faithful shepherds in Your church.

Then for members, especially for the brothers and sisters who make up McLean Bible Church, we want to care well for each other. So please help me as I speak and us as we listen to know how to better care for each other and specifically how to protect children around us. In the process, please show Your supernatural care to every person listening to Your Word right now in ways that each of us uniquely needs. I pray that You would draw people to the care and protection today that are found in Jesus alone. In His name we pray. Amen.

Let's read 1 Peter 5, beginning in verse one:

¹ So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Okay, here are three truths about us that are clear in what we just read.

Truth # 1 about us: We are all sheep in need of a shepherd.

The imagery here in verse two is clear. Pastors are to shepherd their flocks. Then in verse four, Jesus is described as the chief Shepherd. This is imagery we see throughout the Bible. Isaiah 53:6 says, “*All we like sheep have gone astray...*” from God, our Shepherd. So there’s a sense in which every one of us, regardless of whether or not you’re a Christian, is a sheep in need of a shepherd, because we’ve all gone astray from God. We’ll talk about that more in a minute.

The Bible also describes the people of God and followers of Jesus as sheep. The most famous Psalm in the Bible, Psalm 23, says, “*The Lord is my shepherd...*” This is why the Bible describes the church here in 1 Peter and in other places as a flock of sheep. It’s pretty humbling when you think about it. I mean, we like to think of sheep as cute cuddly animals, but the reality is they are not cute and they are not cuddly. Sheep are dirty. They’re easily susceptible to all kinds of pests, lice, ticks and worms. Sheep have to be washed with strong chemicals to get rid of all that stuff.

And they’re not smart. Sheep are hopelessly, helplessly foolish. They aimlessly wander and whenever they get into danger, they have no defense mechanism. All they can do is run, but they’re slow. This is the imagery the Bible uses to describe us. The Bible does not refer to us in the church as jaguars or stallions or some kind of triumphant, strong animal. No, we are aimless, wandering, dirty, dumb sheep. But that’s kind of the point. Jesus came to the world, not for clean, perfect, easy people, but for sinful, dirty, messed up people like you and me. We are all sheep in need of a shepherd.

Truth # 2 about us: We are all sinners in a world of suffering.

If you look through this passage, you see sin in everybody. You see it in pastors and elders in the church who are prone to lead the church for selfish, shameful gain in a domineering way. And it’s in people in the church whose lives are marked by pride. Peter says in verse five that God opposes the proud who look out for themselves and who refuse to trust in Him.

When you think about it, pride is the root of all sin, because sin says, “We know better than God. Our ways are better than His ways. Our thoughts are better than God’s thoughts.” So we turn from God in prideful sin. All of us do; all of us have. As a result of sin in and around us, we live in a world of suffering.

Now, the specific context here in 1 Peter is these Christians in the first century were experiencing all kinds of unjust suffering as a result of being Christians. Throughout this letter, Peter is acknowledging this world of suffering around them. He references that suffering in verses nine and ten here. Even though circumstances are different for us, by God’s grace, in the country where we have freedom to worship, the reality remains the same: we are all sinners in a world of suffering.

Truth # 3 about us: We are all susceptible to attack on all sides.

In 1 Peter 5:8, he says, “*Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*” If you heard the roar of a lion in this room right now, I am guessing that would change your posture. That’s what Peter was telling people then and it’s what the Bible is telling us now. There is a lion in this room; he’s just not one you can see.

The Bible teaches that the devil and demons are continually on the prowl and not confined to where we’re sitting right now. You’ll notice the imagery here is different than what we sometimes see in the Bible. We sometimes see the devil pictured as a sly snake who sneaks up on you. But not here. Here he’s a roaring lion whose aim is to devour. The word literally means to swallow up and destroy.

Open your eyes. Every single person within the sound of my voice, there is a lion-like adversary right now who wants to destroy your life. He wants to destroy your marriage. He wants to destroy your family. He wants to destroy this church. We are all susceptible to attack on all sides through all kinds of temptations. He wants to pull us away from God in all kinds of trials. He wants to get us away from the Shepherd.

This means that just like sheep don’t need to sleep when a lion is on the prowl, we need to be watchful and alert, aware—as 2 Corinthians 2:11 says—of the devil’s schemes. Don’t think for a second that he is just on the prowl out in the world. He is on the prowl in the church. That’s what 1 Peter is saying. Open your eyes and resist him.

So as I mentioned, there are many different directions we could go right now to apply this word to our lives, ways the adversary wants to attack our lives in the church. But the application I want to make specifically today is to the protection of children.

Let’s pause here because what we’re about to dive into is not specifically spelled out in God’s Word. We don’t have verses that talk about specific rules of a child protection policy. Instead, what we’re talking about at this point is our attempts to apply what we see in God’s Word in this particular area. The reason why I want to dive into this particular area is because it seems like every week we read stories in the newspapers, on TV and on social media about child safety or abuse in our culture. It’s like predators are innovating ways to sin at rates that are faster than schools, daycares, sports leagues, camps and other places for children are innovating ways to protect.

This includes churches, which is why we need to talk about this in this setting. Some people would say, “Don’t talk about this issue here” for a variety of reasons, but not talking about this is part of the problem. If we’re going to be watchful, like 1 Peter 5:8 says, we need to talk about it. That’s because we read stories of churches, even large churches with security departments and child protection policies like MBC, that are not immune to attack.

For example, some of you may recall a situation that occurred before I came here as pastor involving one adult here at the Tysons campus who engaged in inappropriate communication and conduct

as a volunteer from The Rock, our student ministry. A public letter was sent to many parents, making them aware of this issue and outlining various steps the church had taken to address that situation, including reporting to and alerting law enforcement, removing that person from membership and issuing that person a “no trespass” order.

That situation was a wake-up call and galvanized the church to do more training, include fingerprinting as a part of background checks, make security improvements to facilities and other steps. But here’s the deal. Yes, that situation was years ago; yes, that volunteer is no longer in our church; yes, these security improvements were good. But I’ve been meeting over months now with parents who are still hurting from that situation in the past and who are raising good questions and concerns about how we can better protect children and students and train families.

I have increasingly come to realize that security steps we have taken have been a good start, but they are only the start, not the finish line. I believe we need to do more and better together. So here’s what I’ve put in motion, just to make you aware. Months ago I commissioned an outside group with expertise in helping churches and similar organizations to protect children. I have asked them to evaluate all our policies, procedures and practices at MBC in the past, including that situation, and in the present to make sure we are doing everything we possibly can to protect children.

Let me just pause at this point and say that if you ever have any concerns about child safety issues, past or present, in this church or any other place—please, contact someone immediately. Contact the police here at the church. We have a phone number that goes straight to our Director of Security who has served in law enforcement. If you ever see or suspect anything, as soon as possible, please notify an appropriate authority using this number or by contacting another leader in the church. Don’t hesitate, because you may see something that will help connect dots of what other people may see.

So this outside group is going to be collaborating with our staff. We’ve already begun an extensive process with our staff and volunteers, not just so that our current protection is as current as possible, but so that we have an ongoing process in place for improving our protection in the days to come. We want to be ahead of threats in our culture, not behind them. Yes, right now we have policies about background checks and fingerprinting for volunteers. We have camera set-ups in rooms, police presence in areas with minors, volunteers never being in a private room alone with a minor, including bathrooms,. We have restrictions on digital social media communication between volunteers and minors. I could go on, but the point is we need to continually improve and consistently implement these policies and procedures, even if inconvenient.

That’s the point why I’m sharing all of this with you. You might think, “Why are you diving into all this today, sharing all this with us on a Sunday in this setting? If you shared it with staff, isn’t this their job?” The answer is, this is not just about staff; it’s not even just about volunteers. This is about all of us working together as a church in a culture of care for kids and students. Having this kind of culture means

we are all playing a part in it, through giving to support children's and students' ministries, through interceding continually for the next generation and through volunteering in kids' and students' ministry.

These are formative years that we will never get back in our kids' lives. Most people come to faith in Jesus when they are children. These years are so important for how children and students view God, so we want them to know the love and protection and provision of God. This means it involves all of us. We need strong adult/child ratios in all of our kids' and students' ministries.

I did not preach last week, so I went around the facility to thank people for how they're serving. I'll just say, we need more workers for children and students. Singles, seniors, married couples with no children, let me encourage you to worship during one service and serve in another. And parents—worship with your kids during one service, then let them go to age-appropriate activities while you're serving somewhere. We all need to own the care, nourishment and protection of children. This isn't just another person's job—this is everyone's job. We are a church family called by God to protect this flock.

This is why I am calling many more of you to care for our kids and teens. I don't want you to see this as, "Okay, I guess I'll serve in a small role like that." This is no small role; this is a giant role. I will never forget Mrs. Romo, my first-grade small group teacher. She was a senior adult woman teaching me the Word week in and week out when I was in first grade. I kept in touch with her so much that when she died, her family asked me—as a kid—to sit with them at her funeral. My life today is the fruit of my first-grade small group teacher.

This is a giant role and one of the most important roles we can play. Jesus even said in Matthew 18:5, "*Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.*" Do you want to receive Jesus? Care well for kids. In our culture today—and I would argue in any culture at any time, but especially today—caring for children means working together with vigilance.

If I could, let me speak specifically, face to face, with other parents right now. This is not just an issue in the church. This is an issue in our homes, neighborhoods and in all the activities our kids are involved in. In talking with this outside group, they basically said that churches and families together need to be running child protection like we have a Ph.D. in this area. Due to the changing cultural climate surrounding sexual morality, social media, additional technologies and ways predators adapt their approaches, churches and families need to be operating with a Ph.D. on child protection.

The problem now is, even churches that have worked hard and are ahead of the curve are operating at about a college freshman level, and the average family is behind that—back in middle school or even elementary school. That means we don't just need to address this issue in the church; we need to address this issue in every facet of our kids' lives. We need to have conversations with them about this, obviously in age and developmentally appropriate ways.

We need to talk about what it means to stay close to home, going into someone else's home, who to talk to when they're lost or need help, how not to be caught in awkward situations and how to wisely

interact on social media and in texting. For older kids and teens, we need them to understand how predators think and act, what to do and who to speak to if someone does something inappropriate, knowing that harmful things thrive in privacy and predators know how to make that happen.

We can't assume that just because you know someone, it's okay for them to be alone with your child. More than 80% of the time victims know the person who is harming them, most often taking place in the context of an ongoing relationship. This means that just because you know someone from church does not mean rules that apply on the church campus should not apply off the church campus. So if they shouldn't be alone with your child on campus, should they be alone with your child off campus?

As parents, we can't assume that just because someone volunteers at church and passes all these checks—or just because someone's on staff or is called a pastor, for that matter—we don't need to pay attention. We've all read or heard stories about people who claim to be spiritual leaders manipulating their influence in children's lives for selfish aims. We're going to have more and more training along these lines for parents and let me encourage you, don't be too busy to attend these.

I don't want to just speak to parents. To children or students who are listening right now, there's so much about this that I could say do say to my own kids. I want to encourage you to talk with your parents and people you trust about how you can guard yourself and others from harm. Harmful things like we're talking about today often happen when kids and teenagers get disconnected from their parents and people who love them. So don't be in that position. No matter how frustrated you or they may get at times, don't hide things in your life from the people God has put in your life who love and long to protect you. Kids, students, parents, church: we cannot hide from this, be casual about this or pretend it's not real. This is an ongoing battle that's not getting any easier and it's not going away. God has called us to care well for each other. Care is the right word.

Over several months of meeting with those affected by the situation I mentioned from the past, I have been grieved, not only by the hurt they have experienced, but also by ways we could have cared for them better in the aftermath. At a time when they should have felt embraced, loved and supported by the church, they have felt marginalized, shamed and even ignored. That should not be. While I want to protect their privacy, I want to publicly apologize to them for the way we as a church have not better displayed the care of Christ for them, and for how I could and should have done more to care for them when I came here. I know I can't change the past, but I know we can change the future in how we care for our children and how we care for each other.

In bringing this issue to the surface, I know I'm speaking to many people right now who have been harmed at some point in your life—and for a significant percentage of you, it was when you were a minor. Before I speak specifically to you, I want to encourage you, if you haven't already, to seek out someone else to share with and process through what happened to you. By all means, report it to the appropriate authorities if you've not done that. No one is intended to walk through this alone. I know

there are different stories and different degrees of abuse. Without going into detail, I just want to say I'm with you. Based on the Word of God, what was done to you was wrong. Regardless of what kind of harm it was—physical, verbal or sexual—it was evil. It was not your fault. You were sinned against at a time when you were vulnerable. Instead of being protected, you were violated.

You may feel like what happened to you defines you now. You may feel like that is who you are, but that is not true. Whoever harmed you and whatever happened to you does not define you. The God of the universe defines you. He says you are fearfully and wonderfully made by Him, in His image (Psalm 139:14).

The God of the universe has come to this world of suffering in the person of Jesus. Although He was completely innocent, Jesus suffered at the hands of sinners, He died, then He rose from the grave, defeating sin and suffering. Returning to our study in God's Word, He says to all who know Jesus, and especially to those who have been harmed in these ways, "You can cast all your cares on Me, because I care for you" (5:7).

Truth # 1 about Jesus: He faithfully bears your burdens.

When we see this word "to cast" your cares and anxieties on Jesus, it literally means to throw something on something or someone else. Luke 19 describes how they threw coats on the donkey for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem. Hear this invitation. So many people who have suffered harm have only two ways to deal with the past. One, they try to cover it up with denial or busyness or whatever other avenues they can find. Or two, they get stuck in memories that continually churn up anger and fear and terror.

But there is a third way to deal with the pain and that is to pour out your heart to God, to cast on Him all your emotions, aches, questions, confusion, pain and grief. When you do this, God says, "I will bear that burden for you." The God of the universe says to you, "Your cares are My concern."

It's interesting that this verse in 1 Peter is based on Psalm 55:22, when the psalmist David had been betrayed by someone he trusted—which is likely the case for you if you've been harmed in these ways. At the end of the Psalm, David says, "*Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you.*" In other words, in a world where people let you down so you have a hard time trusting anyone anymore, you can look up to the God of the universe Who says, "I will always be faithful to you. I will carry your burdens like a donkey carries baggage. You do not have to bear this burden alone." Jesus will faithfully bear it for you as you call out to Him.

Truth # 2 about Jesus: He will heal your hurts.

As Jesus bears your burdens, He will take it a step further and heal your hurts. Jesus graciously heals your hurts. We see in 1 Peter 5:10, "*After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace...will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.*" Hear those four words. They're like four

synonyms back to back to back to back. Do you know what that word “restore” means in the original language of the New Testament? It means to put things right. This world is not right. What happened to you was not right, but one day Jesus is going to make things right. One day Jesus is going to enforce final justice and enact full redemption.

This compels me to pause for a moment here and turn my attention to anyone in the sound of my voice who has harmed someone else in these ways—specifically a child—or who is harming someone now, or is plotting to do so. I want to urge you to repent, to turn from sin. If that is in the past, turn from sin to the God of all grace Who will forgive you when you repent before Him, when you confess your sin to Him and to others. Obviously, depending on what that is, humbly receive any consequences of that sin in this world. You will receive consequences. The question is will you do so now with mercy before God or will you do so when it is too late in judgment before God?

Turn from sin in the past and turn from sin in the present in the same way. If you are tempted in any way toward harming others in the future, seek help. If you’re a part of this church, call us; we want to help you resist the devil who wants to destroy you while using you to harm others. Resist him. God in His grace has brought you to hear this at this moment to turn now to the God of all grace Who is speaking to your heart right now. Turn to the God Who one day will make all things right.

Back to those who have been hurt, hear this next word from God—restore. To all who humbly look to Him, Jesus graciously heals your hurts. Joel 2:25 says, *“I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten.”* Jesus has power to restore you completely—not just to heal your hurt and pain, but to free you from anger and bitterness and all the other ways the devil would like to use your suffering to destroy you and drive you further away from God. Jesus has power to restore and redeem you into relationship with the God Who not only defines your identity, He’s the God Who shapes your destiny.

Truth # 3 about Jesus: He ultimately guarantees your glory.

Your destiny is not ultimately a story of abuse or shame or suffering, because Jesus ultimately guarantees your glory. Did you see that in 1 Peter 5:10? *“And after you have suffered a little while...”* I want to be careful here. The intent of this passage is not to minimize the pain and hurt in the “little while.” The reality is that for these Christians, suffering sure seemed like it was lasting a long while and it was hard. But compared to the eternal glory that is to come, it was a little while and there was hope. Three times in this passage we read the word “glory.”

Verse ten states, *“After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ...”* Now, you might read that and think, “That’s talking about God’s eternal glory. So David, why did you say Jesus guarantees my glory?”

Well, look back up in verse four where Peter writes, *“When the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”* Then look back up in verse one where Peter calls himself and all

who are followers of Jesus a “*partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed.*” A partaker—what does that mean? It means someone who shares or participates in or experiences the glory that is going to be revealed.

Remember Romans 8:28? We cling to this verse all the time. “*We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose...*” With all things—even the worst things—God has the power to turn them for good and for His purpose. And what is His purpose? Well, keep going. Romans 8:29-30: “*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*”

This is the Word of God. Hear it loud and clear. Nothing, absolutely nothing that has happened to you or could ever happen to you can take away the glory God has designed for you who trust in Jesus. This means that for those who trust in Jesus, sin and abuse will not have the last word. For all who trust in Jesus, there is coming a day when sin will be no more, abuse will be annihilated and shame, sorrow and suffering will be gone. Satan will be cast down and the true Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lamb Who was slain for sin—the Savior and Shepherd of our souls—will glorify us with Him and we will say, “To Him belongs the dominion forever and ever.” To the One Who faithfully bears our burdens and graciously heals our hurts and ultimately guarantees our glory—to Him belongs dominion forever and ever.

Let’s keep going in Romans 8. What then shall we say in response to this, in a world of suffering where we are susceptible to attack on all sides? Here’s what we say: “*If God is for us, who can be against us?...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword*”...or abuse?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let’s pray. I want to invite everyone to bow your heads and close your eyes. I want to ask you a question, right where you’re sitting before God, that is the most important question I could possibly ask you. Have you trusted in Jesus to be the Savior of your sin and the Shepherd of your soul? This is the most important question you need to answer today. If you cannot answer that question with a resounding “yes” in your heart, I want to invite you to put your trust in Jesus today. Right now, in this moment, I want to give you an opportunity to place your faith in Him.

Just say in your heart to God, “Dear God, I am a sinner. Like a sheep, I have strayed from You. But today I trust that Jesus died on the cross for my sin. I ask you now to forgive me of my sin against You and restore me to a right relationship with You. In this world of sin and suffering, in me and around

me, today I trust You to shepherd my life with Your strength, Your care and Your hope, all the way to eternal glory.”

With our heads still bowed, I want to invite you to do something. Before God, if you just prayed that and put your faith in Jesus, I want to invite you to lift your hand where you are indicating that, “Yes, I trust You, Jesus, with my life today.” Amen.

God, You see these hands and hearts and lives. I praise You for those who are experiencing new life and a hope right now in Jesus. I pray that You would give them and others courage to celebrate new life in You today through baptism.

In light of all we’ve walked through today, I pray for all of us—particularly those who have experienced harm like we talked about—that You would indeed bear burdens and heal hurts. Help us live in light of guaranteed glory to come.

I pray for those who have harmed others that they will repent and turn to You.

O God, we pray together, that You would help us guard the flock, to care for one another well, particularly for the children and students among us. I pray that together we might all know Your care and protection through Your love on display in the church. Please may it be so, we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter it in any way, use the material in its entirety, and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to the media on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Radical.

All Scriptures are quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By David Platt. © David Platt. Website: Radical.net